WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY - Founded December 17, 1857 MARCH-APRIL 1985

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

ANN ARBOR IN TUNE WITH RADIO RAGE: CITY HOME OF ARBORPHONES, MIDGET KADETTES, WEDEMEYERS

Vintage radio collector Everitt "Abe" Lincoln, WCHS February speaker, said practically everybody tried making radios at one time, including Ann Arborites.

In 1931, when the typical radio was a perhaps beautiful but bulky floor model or 20" table model, Ann Arbor's International Radio Corporation came out with a "midget" AC-DC Kadette, 14' x 16" x 9".

The next year, they came out with a much smaller Kadette, 2½" x 4½" x 6", not much larger than the company's later famous Argus 35mm "candid" cameras. Lincoln said the first "portable" radio weighed 40 pounds. This one weighed two.

The inventor and local company president was the colorful Charlie Verschoor "who had already made and lost three fortunes in automobile and radio manufacturing" according to an article by Mary Hunt in the *Ann Arbor News* March 23, 1970.

Before the Kadette, Verschoor had made large floor model Arborphone radios from about 1925-30 in the old Star Motor Company building on Wildt Street near Summit which burned in a spectacular fire January 5, 1931.

(WCHS Director Calvin Foster, a longtime Argus employee, remembers as a teenager watching that fire which is described in a clipping in his collection of printed matter about Argus which he gave the Society.)

Verschoor was associated with a succession of companies, some of which went broke and were reorganized. At least two of them, associated with Arborphone were Precision Products and, just before the fire, Cavac Company, after his initials. C.A.V.

George Wedemeyer, retired president of Wedemeyer Electronic Supply Company, told Lincoln he once built a radio called the Wedemeyer, one of which is in Henry Ford Museum.

Lincoln borrowed an Arborphone which is regularly on display at Purchase Radio Supply, 327 East Hoover, for the WCHS meeting.

DON'T FORGET 1985 DUES, WCHS WANTS YOU ABOARD

WCHS annual dues letters were mailed. If you received yours, please don't forget to sign up for 1985. If you didn't, let us know or simply send appropriate dues to Mrs. Patricia Austin, Membership Chairman, 1931 Coronada Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48103, with your name, address and phone number.

Annual dues are $8, individual; $15 per couple; $2 per student; and $50, sustaining. Senior individual (60 or over) is $6, senior couple (only one must be 60), $11. Questions? Call 663-5281.

PLEASE NOTE: MARCH MEETING THURSDAY

PLEASE NOTE: The March meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. THURSDAY, March 28, not on Sunday as recently.

WCHS met the fourth Thursday evening of the month for years and some members prefer it. The April 14 meeting will again be on Sunday and the annual meeting Wednesday evening May 22. Let us know your preferences—weekday evenings or Sunday afternoons.

WCHS TO TOUR FORTS ON DETROIT RIVER

Plans are being made to visit historic forts on both sides of the Detroit River on the annual tour Saturday, June 8. They are Fort Wayne in Detroit and restored Fort Malden at Amherstburg, Ontario, opposite Bob-Lo Island. Don't forget to mark your calendar. Final details in May.

'MEDICAL HUMBUG: THE MICHIGAN CONNECTION' PROFESSOR'S TOPIC

There has been an outpouring of quackery in the last 10 years, Richard L. Malvin, U-M professor of physiology believes.

Malvin who is president of the Michigan Society for Medical Research says "people believe insane things about science."

He teaches a sophomore class in the honors college, "The History of Medicine and the Art of Humbug" to help students learn to make rational decisions.

He will speack to WCHS at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 28, at the Ann Arbor American Legion on "Medical Humbug: The Michigan Connection."

Much of his slide-illustrated talk will focus on the development of corn flakes and the former Kellogg Sanitarium in Battle Creek which he believes was steeped in the quackery of that day.

Born and brought up in Brooklyn, Professor Malvin graduated from McGill, New York University and the University of Cincinnati. He came to Ann Arbor in 1956. Most of his research is on hypertension (high blood pressure).

PROFESSOR ANGUS WILL TALK ABOUT ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS APRIL 14

One-room school days will be David L. Angus's subject at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, April 14, at the Ann Arbor American Legion, 1035 South Main.

His talk on "Country and Village Schools of Washtenaw, Community Conflict and Consensus" will be illustrated by slides of all standing one-room schools in the county.

Professor Angus, who earned a Ph.D. at Ohio State, teaches the history of education in the U-M School of Education.

COLLECTOR 'HOOKED' AT 8

EARLY RADIO BROUGHT WORLD INTO HOME

The Battle of New Orleans would not have been fought and most of the passengers on the Titanic probably saved if radio or wireless telegraphy, had been readily available, Everitt "Abe" Lincoln told the WCHS February audience.

Radio is relatively new in the course of human history. The word has been a familiar part of our language for only about 60 years, he noted.

A retired dairy farmer and former state legislator of Albion, Lincoln has been intrigued with radio since he first heard a neighbor's when he was eight years old.

A few years later he could repair and build them and he was able to follow his interest in electronics during Army service in the Signal Corps in World War II and Korea.

The Battle of New Orleans was fought January 8, 1815 two weeks after the peace treaty was signed in Ghent, Belgium, for the War of 1812. More than 2,000 English troops were killed or wounded and 13 Americans were killed.

If was after 10 p.m. April 15, 1912 that the Titanic hit the iceberg. Within 20 miles was a freighter whose one wireless operator (dots and dashes) had gone to bed at 10 p.m. and didn't hear the SOS. The next closest ships were 200 miles away. By the time they arrived more than a thousand lives were lost.

As a result of the tragedy, an international law was passed that any ship on the high seas must maintain a wireless operator 24 hours a day.

The telegraph had been invented before the Civil War, enabling communication over wires by Morse Code or dots and dashes.

In 1899, Marconi succeeded in sending a wireless ship-to-shore message by code. But Morse code was not as readily understandable as voice. Wireless voice communication did not become possible until 1919.

Radio was invented by many people. Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity were he flew a kite. Thomas Edison invented the electric light bulb in 1879.

It was later perfected as a radic vacuum tube by work of Sir John A. Fleming in England and Lee DeForest in the United States in 1906.

Edison had noticed a deposit on the glass from a filament. The bulb was made into a radio tube by inserting a plate for the deposits to fall on and a grid to control the flow of electricity across the plate, Lincoln explained.

The tube is called a valve in England. It revolutionized radio reception at home because the rectifier of the crystal set could not amplify sound, necessitating headphones.

E.H. Armstrong, an American inventor, had a great many patents including the superheterodyne circuit and frequency modulation. "On any radio you have at home, I warrant you will find some Armonstrong patents."

In 1919, Frank Conrad in Pittsburgh took the continuous wave of the telegraph, heretofore "chopped up" into dots and dashes or long and short electrical impulses, and decided he could carry voice on it by modulating it with what we know as a microphone.

In 1921 he established the first public broadcast station, KDKA in East Pittsburgh, which was taken over by Westinghouse for whom he worked.

In order to sell radios, you had to have a transmitting station. Paul Crosley of Cincinnati built station WLW. On the first Crosley radio dials there were numbers from "ought to 100" except it said "WLW" instead of a number where they were located on the dial.

Development came fast. In 1925 you could not build enough radios to satisfy demand so people bought kits for $30-$40 and built their own.

"Radio hardware progressed also. In the early days, transmitting was by spark much the same as on the old Model T Ford car. The bigger the dynamo that created the spark, the bigger the spark. The bigger the spark, the more distance it would cover.

In 1930 many homes and some cars had radios. By 1950 almost every home and auto had radios, some homes three or four.

Who made radios? Practically everyone connected with the automobile industry, phonograph makers, piano makers, Brunswick. All gave it a try.

American Bosch that made magnetos for engines made radios. Sparks-Withington in Jackson made Sparton radios.

"In 1927 they discovered how to make the radio tube that could be used on alternating current and plugged into an ordinary home electric plug.

"Up to that time they ran on direct current from batteries. To run on alternating current you had to have a cathode.

"The Philadelphia Battery Company which had been making the old six volt storage batteries used in radios found themselves going bankrupt, so they started making radios. You know them now as Philco."

"The first presidential election return was broadcast in 1920 but very few heard it because there weren't many sets. Republicans Harding and Coolidge, defeated Democrats Cox and FDR.

When Lincoln was eight, a neighbor invited him and his dad to see their new radio. They walked about a half mile, sat down on either side of the round cone speaker and listened to a prize fight.

He thought radio was something fantastic. At 12 years of age, he could repair the sets.

From October 1932 McCall's

"In 1927 the first continential hook-up broadcast the Rose Bowl game in Pasadena.

"In the 1930's the "cathedral" radio sets that look like church windows came into being. They are the most popular vintage radios today. I can't get enough of them. Some of them take three to four months to restore. I have a waiting list.

THE TUBE CHALLENGE

People bought radios by the number of tubes, Lincoln said. Roy Purchase of Purchase Radio Supply in Ann Arbor has told of former salesmen for Arborphone Radios, once made in Ann Arbor, who said, often in a 12 tube set only eight worked.

"But the tubes were hitched up in series, so if challenged, you pulled one out and the radio went off, 'proving' the tube worked."

For the first time in history, a person used radio to campaign. After election, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) "spent some 28 fireside chats with the people of the nation."

The 1930's were the golden age of radio, he said. Everybody talked about what they heard on the radio last night.

There was Amos and Andy, the Hit Parade, Hollywood Hotel with Frances Langford, Johnny—and I don't mean Carson—and his "call for Philip Morris", the Goldbergs, the Theater off Times Square, and Lux Radio Theater with Cecil B. DeMille.

There was Little Orphan Annie, Jack Armstrong, the All-American boy, Kate Smith, Chandu the Magician, Bing Crosby, Comedians like Jack Benny, Red Skelton, and Burns and Allen got their start in radio. George Burns is still around.

There were Ed Wynn, Joe Penner (ya wanna buy a duck?), and Jimmy Durante with the nose. Newscasters were H.V. Kaltenborn, Gabriel Heatter, Edward R. Murrow and in sportscasting, one person, Graham McNamee.

People listened to ball games and prize fights. There were fighters like Max Baer, Max Schmeling, Primo Carnera and Joe Louis. As far back as 1922 Will Rogers appeared on various programs as a guest artist.

Radio brought sponsors, the singing commercial, soap opera, disc jockeys and on-the-spot newcasts. In 1935 when Will Rogers was killed with Wiley Post in a plane crash at Point Barrow, Alaska, you heard it almost instantly.

A newscaster for Chicago's WLS got on an American Airlines plane and marveled that in three hours and 55 minutes he was in Newark to meet the dirigible, the Hindenberg, two-and-a-half days out of Frankfort.

As he was describing its arrival, it caught fire at the rear. He described how people leaped from it and it collapsed on the ground.

"With the boob tube, TV, you are limited to whatever you can get into 21 or 23 inches, but on radio the imagination is all up to the individual. Everyone imagines it differently."

The impact of radio was dramatized in 1938 by the famous Orson Welles broadcast which convinced many people we were being invaded on Halloween eve even though he first told listerners this was just a program.

"I had a neighbor who ran down, let the cows out of the barn and chased them to the back 40 because he didn't want anyone to catch them."

Radio brought the world to your home. The people of the United States and the world all shared at the same time in what was taking place.

"I have at home a 1941 Zenith transocean radio, the first year they were built. They quit making them in 1972. "In the back of this 1941 radio was a place to put your name. In it is the name of an Army WAC (Women's Army Corps) stationed in Chicago.

Why restore radios? You couldn't sell radios today using that much time and material. They'd be too costly. Some have condensers made of brass. They were beautiful and they sound well. Early sets were tuned radio frequency, not superheterodynes, and they have a bell-like tone. They ususally require more of an antenna than today's models.

He has one of the first portable radios. It's an RCA. It's a long box with batteries. It weighs 40 pounds. Today's transistors you can hold in your hand.

Some of the cases were fine wood, some were of Bakelite, the first plastic resin invented by L.H. Baekeland in the early years of this century.

There is a radio with a glass front and top supposedly owned by the John Dillinger family at Dixboro. He knows of another radio in Homer supposedly owned by the Al Capone family.

Asked if it was difficult to get tubes to restore the old radios, Lincoln said, "Not really. When they built those radios in the early twenties, they were built to last forever. Most tubes were made by either Cunningham or RCA." He finds them in old sets and in back rooms of dealers he buys out.

"There was't too much repair to the tube sets. The dealer had to make a living. Usually he checked the tubes and he replaced the two or three weakest tubes whether they needed it or not. You can get by with five or six good tubes, the rest duds.

Before and after Lincoln's talk, the audience could look over and listen to some of the vintage radios on display.

Makes represented included Atwater, Kent, Magnavox with horn speaker, Stromberg-Carlson with bearcat speaker, two-tube Radiola, the last Philco "cathedral" of 1937, Montgomery Ward Airline, a 1921 battery radio, a 1925 DC Dayton, a 1928 Grebe of Schenectady, New York, and from Ann Arbor, a 1927 Arborphone and Kadettes of the thirties.

The display also included literature influenced by radio—such as Rudy Vallee sheet music, "Good Night Sweetheart," a book, "The Radio Boys at Ocean Point," 1922.

FIRST 'CHARGE CARD'

The battery radios of the 20's used a six volt car battery to light up the tubes, Lincoln eplained. About every third week the volume would start going down and you had to go get the battery recharged.

I found this little card in a radio I picked up. On the back are dates. If the radio sound started going down you could look on the card and see that it had been almost three weeks since it was charged. So radio is responsible for the first "charge card."

PRESERVATION WEEK FULL OF EVENTS

Several events and exhibits will focus on "Preserving Ann Arbor's Yesterdays" during National Preservation Week May 11-19.

Washtenaw County Historical Society clothing and traveling exhibits will be on display at Jacobson's.

Aunt Louisa's Birthday party, free for children, 1 p.m. Saturday, May 11, Jacobson's, with a skit about the naming of Ann Arbor, opportunity to participate in pioneer crafts.

Historic District Commission preservation awards for residential rehabilitation will be presented and members of the Ann Arbor Symphony will play at a reception 2-5 p.m. Sunday, May 12, at Kempf House. Free, donations requested.

A free noon hour workshop "Research Your Family Tree," at City Hall by the Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County Tuesday, May 14.

Thomas Jones, executive director, Historical Society of Michigan, lecture, "Michigan History," at 7:.30 p.m. May 14, at Reorgazined Church of Latter Day Saints, 520 W. Jefferson. Admission, $2.

Thursday, May 16, Mary Jo Gord will exhibit antique jewelry and appraise yours free, 12-1 p.m., Kempf House. Sandy Hicks, lecture, 7:30 p.m. at LDS Church "Recreating A Historic Garden."

Julie Wortman, architectural historian, leading walking tour of downtown churches, 9:30 a.m. to noon, from Kempf House. Refreshments. Admission $5.

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETINGS

7:30 p.m. THURSDAY March 28, 1985

&

2:30 p.m. SUNDAY April 14, 1985

AMERICAN LEGION 1035 South Main Ann Arbor, Michigan

GENEALOGY SOCIETY SPEAKERS LISTED

JoAnne Jager of the Library of Michigan at Lansing, "Michigan Newspapers on Microfilm," 1:30 p.m. Sunday, April 28, at the Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County meeting, Hale Auditorium, Tappan and Hill Streets, Ann Arbor.

LuAnne Graykowski Kozma of Belleville, "Researching Your Family History Through Oral History Interviewing" Sunday, May 19, same time, place. She is a researcher for Henry Ford Museum and expert on folklore and oral history interviewing.

March 24, Peggy Haines, deputy register of deeds, "Searching the Records of the Register of Deeds Office in Washtenaw County."

MAPLE SUGAR, SPINNING, DOLLS, KID ART ON TAP AT COBBLESTONE FARM

A spinning wheel exhibit and maple sugar harvest is on tap at Cobblestone Farm, 2781 Packard Road, Ann Arbor from 12-5 p.m. Sunday, March 31.

Prospective Cobblestone Farm volunteers are invited to a candlelight reception 7-8:30 p.m. Monday, April 8 at the farm. Representatives of volunteer committees will be on hand to explain opportunities.

An antique doll exhibition will be featured 12-5 p.m. on the weekends of May 4-5 and 11-12. The annual spring festival, 1-4 p.m. Sunday, May 19, will feature farm animals and a children's art exhibit.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
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Published Sept.-May except Dec., Jan.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS AROUND THE COUNTY

Chelsea Historical Society: Meet 7:30 p.m. second Monday at Crippen Recreation Building at Chelsea Methodist Home, 805 West Middle Street.

Dexter Historical Society: Meet 7:30 p.m. first Thursday at museum, 3443 Inverness Street.

Milan Historical Society: Meet 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday at Hack House, 775 County Street. The village was chartered in 1885 and the community plans a centennial celebration next August.

The Society still has copies of its 270-page illustrated hardcover history, *Ancient and Modern Milan, 1830-1976* compiled for the United States Bicentennial by Society Historian Arleigh Squires. Books may be ordered from Mrs. Billie Jean Thornton, 1599 Mooreville Road, Milan, MI 48160, for $11 ($10 plus postage).

Ypsilanti Historical Society: Several dozen paintings and drawings by Arthur Howard of the Society are the current special display at the museum, 220 North Huron, open 2-4 p.m. Friday-Sunday except Easter weekend. Howard drew the museum picture used on society publications. The exhibit includes local scenes as well as elsewhere.

KEMPF HOUSE OPEN

Kempf House Center for Local History, 312 South Division, Ann Arbor, will be open 1-4 p.m. Sundays through May 5, except Easter, staffed by volunteer guides. Free. Refurbishing fund donations welcomed.

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